From :
UK Council on Psychotherapy Journal, Winter 2010
www.ukcp.org.uk
Special Issue on Body Psychotherapy

Levels of consciousness and contact in biodynamic psychotherapy

Clover Southwell explains how biodynamic body psychotherapy works with varying forms of therapeutic interaction across a range of levels of consciousness, both interpersonal and intrapsychic

Biodynamic psychotherapists work in a variety of physical positions, each suitable for a different kind and level of interaction and each furthering in the client different levels of consciousness and exploration. Whether we are working with words, touch or in silence, we are reaching to the whole person and expecting our work to affect body and psyche together.

1/**Client and therapist sitting face to face** This is the most natural position for interpersonal work – for reflection, making sense of experience, drawing things together. In this position, the work will be mainly at the conscious level, but it will also integrate what has been emerging from the unconscious. At certain junctures the therapist may draw a client's attention to how they are sitting, their breathing or body sensation, so that they have a felt experience of themselves as they speak ('rooted talking').

2. Therapist and client standing up This is a position of assertion and mobility. Allowing free movement in the room, it gives the client the chance – literally – to determine their distance from therapist and to 'hold their ground'. Work in this position evokes the client's will and intention; it supports a sense of agency, of being in charge.

3. Client lying on mattress, therapist sitting alongside Their respective eyelines do not meet, so the client can relax deeply, allowing their eyes to close with no sense of rudely shutting the therapist out. This position is ideal for working at a deep, intrapsychic level (biodynamic vegetotherapy). In the three positions above, the client engages in an active

process of exploration.

4. Client lying on massage table, therapist works standing Various forms of biodynamic massage support the therapeutic process in specific ways, developing more sense of structure and containment (see 'building up' below) or enabling the client to become more sensitive to their own inner world ('opening up'). The touch may seem light, but the work will set off cascades of change through all levels of a person's being, affecting their mood and their dreams for days afterwards. To see biodynamic massage as 'bodywork' is to miss its essence. Depending on the client's earlier experiences of touch – caring or abusive – the massage may bring pleasure or anxiety. Some clients will experience the massage on an intensely interpersonal level, staying alert throughout the session to monitor what the therapist is doing to them. Another might drift off into a wonder world of fleeting images, ungraspable yet deeply enriching.

My position in relation to my client on the psychological level will also vary. How closely am I following – aligned with – my client's point of view? Is my client currently revisiting an early symbiotic stage, where close attunement can be vitally reparative? What have I in mind? Am I feeling and thinking transferentially? What am I observing, looking and listening for? How separate am I from my client? At what distance? How explicit are my boundaries? Is my consciousness broader than my clinical thought?

As a client appears for a session, I ask myself, is this person likely to benefit more today from opening up or from building up? By 'opening up' I mean deepening the client's capacity for feeling, broadening their vision, opening unconscious layers. By 'building up' I mean furthering a client's capacity to feel 'on top of the situation' and to deal better with their life and feelings. This means strengthening their emotional equilibrium and motoric ego, both of which have biological aspects. Such an agenda will underlie the session but is not a template for the work, which arises from what the client brings.

Building up

A client easily overwhelmed by ineffectual emotional energy needs to build up emotional equilibrium. They are very aroused, they take rapid little gulps of breath and they may be sniffing back tears. This only winds them up more. They are suspended in a no-man's land above their feelings. We suggest they blow their nose, so they aren't holding back fluid by distorting breath. We ask them to 'let the breath just come easily'. If they manage that, it has a settling effect and can be a step towards detaching from addiction to arousal. When they resume talking, it will probably be on a very different level and about something more essential.
To build up the motoric ego in clients who cannot say no, who find it hard to make decisions, who doubt they have the right to choose, we may suggest making the issue concrete in the room. The client stands. We help them develop a consciously felt connection with the ground. They explore how it is to – literally – 'stand up for myself '. They get a feel for 'putting my foot down'. Practising this vis-à-vis the therapist, who may represent a parent in the past or someone in their life now, brings to light developmental and transferential issues which we may then explore verbally, back in our chairs. Typically, it will be the client who does most of the talking, finding their own way to their own truth, with minimum

intervention.

Opening up

On the other hand, we sometimes have an opposite intention, wanting to help the client open up to their inner sensations, thoughts, images and feelings. With 'stony', armoured clients we may first use some form of biodynamic massage to help them feel their body and what is moving inside. Then they can better reach into their inner world, to uncover elements of themselves that they have hidden, disallowed, suppressed or not developed.
For this active exploration, the client lies on the mattress and we invite them to be aware of their sensations.'Feel your body – let it breathe – see how far down inside you feel the breathing' (biodynamic vegetotherapy). Gradually they sink into awareness of their inner world, defences soften, allowing little stirrings to arise within. This 'dynamic updrift' may come in the form of sensations, emotions, memories, images or something less definable. They may report what is happening, or they may not.

The client is entering the uncharted ocean of the unknown. For some this is an adventure; for others it feels like a risk.The client's trust in the therapist is crucial, allowing them to 'forget' the therapist while following a path of discovery. The connection between therapist and client is like the rope of an anchor. As the therapist speaks or moves, the client feels the connection like a little tug on the rope. Adjusting the length of the rope is a therapeutic art. When the therapist gives a longer rope, the client feels greater space and freedom. A shorter rope gives more sense of security, as well as more guidance.

Observing the silent client, we might soon see the breath get calmer and lighter. This suggests that the client may have shifted to another level of consciousness, where to shape the experience into words would be a huge effort, and break the journey. With

> " The connection between therapist and client is like the rope of an anchor "

more silence comes more spaciousness. Thirty minutes can pass without a word. The client may be moving towards a state of consciousness where time no longer counts, and two minutes by the clock feels like eternity. Eventually, they will 'come back', perhaps with some small movement, opening their eyes, and having a luxurious stretch. Even then, will it be appropriate to speak? A delicate question. The client has been in a silent world and should move out of it in their own time. Language may not have words that fit, so talking now could reduce the experience to match the words available.

Temporary regression

Vegetotherapy sessions can develop in a very different direction. Lying on the mattress the client settles into themselves. As before, the 'dynamic updrift' from their inner world begins to impinge, but now appears as signs of restlessness such a slight twitching of the right hand. We invite the client to 'feel the movement' and then to 'let it get stronger'. We are using non-personal language forms. As yet, the hand movement means nothing to the client. If we ask

‘What are you doing with your hand?’ they might stop the movement: the ego-mind filtering out what it cannot make sense of, censoring what it cannot allow.
Now the movement grows stronger and comes into focus as an emotional gesture, perhaps of disappointment or clutching at something. We ask the client to feel what age they are – ‘quite young’ – and then to feel,
in this age-state, where they are and who is with them. We are now moving from ‘it’ towards ‘I’.‘Talk to that person, tell them how you – this child – are truly feeling.’ As the client speaks out their truth, they feel it in their adult body, more and more. Soon they are past the regression, coming home to themselves, reclaiming a silenced aspect of their intrinsic potential. Such work requires the client to stay aware of their adult here- and-now self, while at the same time casting themselves into the regressive experience.
We adjust our language forms according to the level of consciousness we want to engage. By deliberately postponing the ‘I’ level at certain stages of the session, we can move with almost imperceptible shifts through the borderland where ‘it’ and ‘I’ run into each other like colours of paint. Involuntary runs into voluntary, unconscious into conscious, and we are working seamlessly with ‘mind’ and ‘body’ as one. When we question or confront, this will be at moments when the client is in their here- and-now consciousness. When something is just tentatively emerging from the core, a question could give a deep biological shock. Just as a toddler is clumsy as he tries to pour juice into his mug, so the undeveloped individuality of an adult, particularly if they have repressed a lot of emotional feeling and behaviour, may be both shy and clumsy as it pushes up towards manifestation. A question would speak to the wrong part of the brain.

The dynamic of the therapy

As I see it, each individual from conception on has a unique potential, and this potential is ultimately more significant than pathology. We hold the vision of our client’s unique and as yet unrealised potential, what some call the person’s essence. Our sense of this person’s potential cannot be a precise one. We simply know that far more is possible than has yet become manifest in this person. Their intrinsic biodynamic grows physically into their particular human shape and realises and fulfils their true self: mentally, personally, spiritually. We work in alliance with this intrinsic dynamic, which is also, in the basic sense of the word, psychodynamic. It is the motor of the therapy.

Our therapeutic relationship is its containing membrane of the therapy. At different points in the process, our presence may be that of a counsellor, parent, reliever of pain or guide to the unconscious underworld, as the client awakens to aspects of themselves they had lost touch with and begins to reclaim them and develop them into mature form. Whatever else may be happening at a more interpersonal level, we want to sustain connection with our client’s deepest source. Like a constant bass note sounding beneath everything else, this energy level will underpin and infuse the whole session. It generates and sustains the therapeutic process. Somewhat like the pull of a magnet, this energy in the therapy room seems progressively to draw forth the inner being of the client to manifest and express itself. **P**